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DALLAS MORNING NEWS

Holding on to memories of 11-22-63



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ANDERS**

I still have the permission slip allowing me to leave school that day:

DISD Form S-45; Principal's Permit to Leave School.

This was the standard form that got you out of class to have a cavity filled, or allowed your family a half-day head start on a vacation trip to Lake Murray, Okla.

Only this form was dated 11 a.m., 11-22-63. And in the space provided below where the printed form said, "Your child . . . is being excused from school for the following reason:", the handwritten explanation simply said, "President."

I've kept that eerie souvenir because — despite the nightmare that followed — there's still an odd, hopeful tone to be detected in that yellowed piece of paper. The day began with such promise.

End of Innocence

At the very least, not many people have a memento documenting their last moments of innocence.

Things changed for all of us that afternoon. A whole country lost its innocence.

Somewhat surprisingly, the Dallas Independent School District had decided to allow its students an opportunity to leave school and see John F. Kennedy in Dallas.

In those naive times even presidential parade routes were published in the local newspapers.

The principal of my high school grudgingly abided by the school board ruling, but he still voiced his disapproval over the intercom a few days prior to the presidential visit.

"It's a matter of your personal values," he told us. "Personally, I think you belong here in school."

Our late principal was like that: an

arch conservative who often invited right-wing speakers to address us in assembly. Dallas in those days was a place where we beat our crape myrtle bushes repeatedly in search of Communists.

There were never enough to go around.

Only a small handful of our school's 3,200 students saw President Kennedy, although many kids left Bryan Adams High for a few hours to hang out at the Prince of Hamburgers on Garland Road. Everybody figured he had to make the best of whatever opportunity presented itself.

Picking our spot

Three of us left for the parade route in Bob Spiro's '49 Chevy. We settled on the corner of Lemmon and Oak Lawn to watch the motorcade pass from Love Field en route to downtown.

After 15-20 minutes of waiting, we rushed forward into the street toward the approaching limousine. I remember thinking, *"Why, I could reach right out and touch him."*

My eyes first focused on John Connally's impressive blade of a nose. Then I saw JFK: tanned, handsome and full-faced. He was smiling. Jackie was a blur of pink: I never saw her features.

And that was it. In a moment the limo had moved onward toward its terrible destiny less than 10 minutes away. I walked away thinking this was probably the most exciting moment of my 17-year-old life.

We ate sandwiches near Turtle Creek before heading back to school. At the very moment of our quiet celebration on the creek, the madness was occurring a few miles away in Dealey Plaza.

That evening, while trying to sort out the terrible events of the day, my girlfriend and I drove around the neighborhood near our school. We couldn't accept that anything so shatteringly awful could have happened in the midst of our senior year and right in our own back yard.

Finally, I pulled the car over to the side of the road, and we fell into each other's arms and wept — a pair of scared, uncomprehending kids. It was a scene probably repeated throughout the country that day. The assassination changed everything.

I suppose I keep that permission slip because it's a touchstone to the morning we went out to see the president of the United States and came back to a world that would never again be the same.